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# HUNGER

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Amidst the cries of desperation evoked by hunger in the underdeveloped countries, a voice stands out and resounds from one international conference to another. It is the Director of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization pointing out that per capita food production in these countries is decreasing and that, if nothing is done soon, the consequences will be of unforeseen magnitude. But he does not tell us what is to be done.

Much more important than the words are the facts themselves. Moreover, they reveal what can and must be done to avoid these consequences. The Food and Agricultural Organization's data on per capita food production and protein consumption, recomputed by myself to highlight this threat and solution, are presented in the accompanying graph (see page two).

### PER CAPITA FOOD PRODUCTION

Taking the average yearly per capita production of the pre-war years 1934-1938 as a base, the graph shows that per capita food production in the world as a whole, excluding China, rose 12% (Line I of the graph).<sup>1</sup> The increase was greatest in the capitalist countries. In Africa, for example, the increase was barely 3%. At the same time, in Asia (excluding China) per capita food production decreased 3% and in Latin America 7%. Agricultural production per capita dropped 10% in Latin America.

The world supply of animal proteins (line II), which are of such importance for the physical development of human beings, especially the young, has increased by 15%. The production of animal protein in relation to all classes of protein (line III) increased by 12% throughout the world, but in Latin America this proportion fell by 18%.

In the prewar years the countries with a high per capita level of protein consumption were Europe, North America, Oceania, and in Latin America, Uruguay and Argentina. Their per capita consumption has since risen from 85 grams to 90 grams. In the rest of the world, excluding China, protein consumption declined from 62 grams daily then to 52 grams now.

This black picture of declining food production in the underdeveloped countries, and above all in Latin America, is aggravated by various factors which combine to cry out: HUNGER!

The graph of per capita food production also demonstrates that, while in the developed countries maximum production was reached in the most recent years, the contrary has happened in the underdeveloped ones. Here, and again especially in Latin America, the post war production peak was reached years ago; and in the last few years per capita food production has declined constantly and increasingly. In Africa the maximum production was 6% over pre-war, but this was in 1960/61. Since then it has fallen by 3%. In Asia (excluding China) the maximum reached was no higher than before the war; this was also in 1960/61. Since then, per capita food production has fallen to 3% below the pre-war level. In Latin America the high point was 1% over the pre-war level; this was in 1958/59. From then on per capita food production in Latin America decreased by 8% to reach a level 7% below pre-war figures by 1963/64. In other words, during the last five years, or during the first half of the decade that the United Nations has called the 'decade of development' the situation has significantly improved -- in the developed countries. In the underdeveloped countries it has become worse than ever.

To grasp the full significance of this decline of food production for the level of popular nutrition and welfare, we must bear in mind the nutritional level from which this decline took place. The average consumption recommended for a human being is 3000 calories daily. Naturally, this average varies with climate, altitude, type of work, etc.<sup>2</sup> In the developed countries the average consumption reaches and surpasses these 3000 calories.<sup>3</sup> It is well known that many people there want to lose weight and that they worry about restricting their calorie intake. In contrast, in the countries

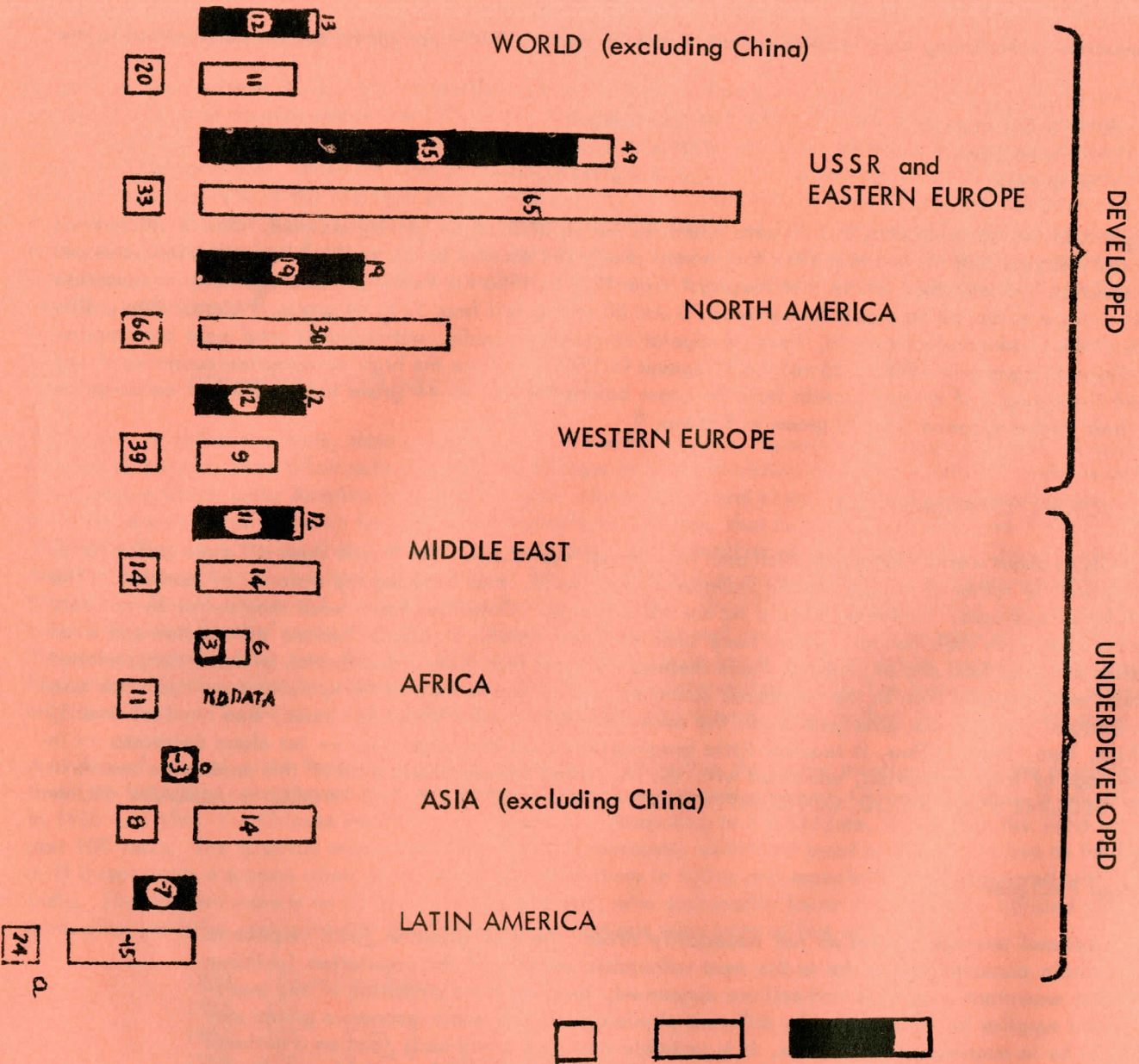
1 All data in the graph, from which all not specifically cited figures in the text are taken, are computed by the author from: United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). *The State of Food and Agriculture 1964*, Rome, 1964, page 16 for line I of the graph and page 108 for lines II and III. 'Recent' is the terminology of FAO.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.



# CHANGES IN PER CAPITA FOOD PRODUCTION & PROTEIN SUPPLIES IN THE WORLD BETWEEN 1934-38 AND 1963/64



## KEY:

- Maximum % change in food prod/cap. since 1934-38 & before 1963/64
- % change of food prod/cap. between 1934-38 and 1963/64
- % change of protein consumption from animal sources between 1934-38 and 1963/64
- grams/capita daily supplies of protein from animal sources in recent years.

Sources: see footnote 1

Note (a): If we omit meat producing Argentina and Uruguay from Latin America its protein supplies from animal sources approximates that of other underdeveloped areas.



where food production is declining, calorie consumption is another matter. Daily per capita calorie consumption in the 1950's was:<sup>4</sup>

2010 in Colombia  
1980 in Pakistan  
1960 in Peru

1910 in India  
1780 in Ecuador  
1760 in the Philippines

The situation is so bad and deteriorating that in some countries the politicians are getting alarmed. Peru's Minister of Agriculture stated this year that his country is the fourth most poorly fed country in the world.<sup>5</sup> In the last ten years per capita food production has decreased 8% in that country. From 1947 to 1956 the Peruvian's average daily consumption of proteins, which for a human being should be between 70 and 80 grams, fell from 53 to 44 grams.<sup>6</sup> Lima, which, like all the capitals of the underdeveloped world, finds its population growing rapidly, witnessed its total meat consumption drop from 33 million kilograms in 1958 to 25 million kilograms in 1960.<sup>7</sup> While the high consumption countries of the world increased their supply of animal protein from 34 grams before the war to 44 grams today, the low consumption countries saw their intake decrease from 10 grams to 9 grams.<sup>8</sup>

### ACTUAL CONSUMPTION

The foregoing tells us about world food production and its regional variations. Yet it still does not show us the bitter truth of consumption, or rather of hunger, in the underdeveloped world, that is among the majority of mankind. The figures given refer to averages. However, people do not eat averages. Only they know what they eat or do not eat. The available statistics hide their hunger. There have been very few careful studies of income distribution and even fewer of the distribution of food and of hunger. Nevertheless, we know that income distribution in the underdeveloped countries is much more unequal than in the developed countries, and of course than in the socialist countries. We also know that the inequality grows year after year in all the countries where studies have been made, like Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, India. Thus, it requires little imagination to see that stagnation -- let alone decreases -- in the national average of food production, combined with the increasing uneven distribution of this production results in an ABSOLUTE DECLINE of the FOOD CONSUMPTION of the MAJORITY OF THE WORLD'S ALREADY HUNGRY PEOPLE.

In this connection FAO observes:

National average figures do not necessarily reveal the real situation [with respect to protein consumption]<sup>9</sup> so far as the most vulnerable sections of the population (children and expectant or nursing mothers) are concerned, because the distribution of the available supplies for consumption by different physiological and socio-economic groups may not be in accordance with needs. It is probable that on a world basis [and on a national basis in most countries, as FAO points out elsewhere]<sup>9</sup> the total available supplies of protein are enough to satisfy the calculated requirements of the whole population. In actual fact, however, many people consume much more protein than they need and supplies must be sufficient to take this into account as well as to satisfy minimum requirements. Thus, for the requirements of all the population to be met, supplies considerably in excess of the calculated average requirement will be needed . . . . In the developed countries requirements are exceeded, even in the lowest income groups. In India, however, the requirements are not met in the lower income groups in the urban areas of Maharashtra [where a survey was made] or in the lowest income groups in rural areas. . . . The proportion of persons with inadequate protein supplies would be slightly higher [than the proportion of households] since the distribution of protein within households is not likely to be in accordance with requirements. Especially in the households where food supplies are limited, the productive members or wage earners may take all the protein they need and even more, at the expense of the nutritionally vulnerable groups [that is,

4 Ibid., p. 228 -- this page cites some recent increases in these averages, which in part reflect food imports.

5 Prensa Latina, 9 de abril de 1965.

6 Virgilio Roel, La economia agraria peruana, tomo 2, Lima 1961, p. 138.

7 El Expreso, Lima, Julio 16, 1962.

8 United Nations FAO, op. cit., p. 108.

9 Ibid., p. 228.



the above mentioned children and pregnant or nursing mothers<sup>7. 10</sup>

In Mexico, for instance, the per capita protein supply meets the national average that is nutritionally necessary. Nevertheless, the Bank of Mexico states that 52% of the population of the Federal District (Mexico City) does not eat meat.<sup>11</sup> In 1960, 24% of the Mexican people did not consume one or more sources of animal proteins such as meat, fish, and eggs.<sup>12</sup> That same year, after the most profound agrarian reform and the largest agricultural development known so far in Latin America, 36% of the Mexican people living in the rural areas did not have access to these products.<sup>13</sup> In Cuzco, noted for its magnificent irrigation works when it was the capital of the Inca Empire before its conquest by Spanish mercantile capitalism, consumption today does not reach 1620 calories and 40 grams of protein per capita.<sup>14</sup> And these figures once more are averages. Nobody tells us how much the majority of Cuzco's people, who are poorer than the average, now consume.

### COMMUNIST COUNTRIES' 'FAILURES'

The graph, or rather the facts, show us something else worthy of note, especially for those in search of solutions to the problem of hunger. They allow us to compare the changes in food production in the 'agricultural' underdeveloped countries, among which Latin America is famous for land reform studies and plans, with the corresponding changes in countries that are universally known for their great agricultural failures, that is the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. We see that, while in the underdeveloped countries of Asia (excluding China), Africa and Latin America put together per capita food production fell 3% and declines more each year, in the ex-underdeveloped countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe it only rose 45%. (By 1938, the Soviet Union had re-attained its pre-collectivization level of agriculture but not livestock production and the other countries were still capitalist. Thus, the increase registered since then did not begin from an exceptionally low base, as might be suspected, though it does reflect the productive calamity and demographic disaster of the intervening war.) The facts speak more eloquently, not only than the well intentioned declarations on progress, but also more eloquently than the propaganda about failures.

A review of several other facts can be similarly useful. Other than the above mentioned socialist countries of Europe there are two other countries whose agricultural failures are universally known: China and Cuba. It is well known that in 1960 and 1961 the Chinese harvests were disastrous. According to the Chinese, these were the worst harvests in the past 100 years. The question arises, then, whether this represents additional proof of China's failure to feed her people, or if it represents a success when compared with earlier times in China and especially when compared with contemporary India. The Western experts on Chinese economic affairs, who customarily lower the sometimes inflated official Chinese production statistics, estimate that the Chinese grain harvests were more or less as follows:<sup>15</sup>

1953	156	million tons	
1955	174	"	"
1957	185	"	"
1958	200	"	" (official 250 million)
1959	180	"	" (official 280 million)
1960	150	"	" (first official 190 million)
1961	150	"	"
1962	200	"	"
1963	185	"	"
1964	200	"	"

An Indian author, writing in a magazine associated with his country's governing party, estimates that Chinese grain requirements for 1960 were approximately 180 million tons.

It is evident [he continues] that food-grains output during 1957-59 exceeded that figure

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10 Ibid., pp. 111-113.

11 Banco Nacional de Mexico, Examen de la situacion economica de Mexico, March 1965, cited in El Dia, Mexico.

12 Pablo Gonzales Casanova, La democracia en Mexico. Mexico, Era, 1965, pp. 210-211.

13 Ibid.

14 El Comercio, Lima, citado por Prensa Latina, 8 de abril de 1965.

15 Edgar Snow, 'Facts about Food,' in The Other Side of the River: China Today. New York, 1961, pp. 623-629; Time; and Rene Dumont La Chine Surpeuplee, quoted in Joan Robinson, 'China and the Communes,' New Left Review, London, No. 37, May-June 1966, p. 72.



by a substantial margin. After allowing for export which was but a small part of the aggregate output, we would safely assume that the Chinese Government had built up a buffer of about 20-40 million tons out of the bumper crops in the previous years. It may be that the annual grain output in 1960 and 1961 was in the neighbourhood of about 150 million metric tons. It, therefore, appears that when the reserves are taken into account, the deficit in food supply in these years may not have exceeded 10 per cent of the normal requirements. It is true that some areas were subjected to total failure of crops; and, owing to the enormous strain on the limited means of transportation, scarcity affected some localities more acutely than others. But the widespread network of rationing and the rigorous check on unplanned migration of population saved China from starvation.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous later studies confirm that it was precisely the system of agricultural communes and its co-operative organization which helped the Chinese people considerably to overcome this crisis. Bad harvests, which as is well known, caused death by starvation to tens of millions throughout China's history were, on this occasion, overcome and even defeated without any starvation and since those years the harvests have again increased, re-attaining and surpassing their previous levels.

## CHINA -- INDIA

Let us compare China's food situation with those of other countries and with India's in particular. A Western expert, writing in an avowedly anti-Communist magazine, analyzed a series of Chinese surveys and described them as 'results of an investigation free from all political prejudices.' These surveys reveal consumption in agricultural communes from 2,245 calories in August to 3,000 and 4,000 calories per person during the harvest of 1958 and 1959.<sup>17</sup> 'The diet,' concludes the same author, 'is sufficient to maintain the Chinese people in good health and able to work,' even in 1961, which was the worst year of the past 100 years.<sup>18</sup> Another author, who visited China during those bad years, calculated the average urban consumption at 1,400 calories of grains plus 500-800 calories derived from animals and vegetables.<sup>19</sup> The peasants, who make up the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people, ate much more: an average of between 2000 and 3500 with seasonal variations, according to the same author.<sup>20</sup> We have already noted the Latin American national averages of 2000 calories which, unlike the Chinese, are very unequally distributed; and this consumption of 2000 calories in Latin America is not in the worst but in the best years -- since now per capita food production decreases from year to year.

Now let us look at the race between China and India -- which promises to weigh heavily in determining the world's future. From 1952 to 1955 per capita grain production was 30% higher in China than it was in India. Comparing a good crop year in India (1958/59) with China's worst in a hundred years (1960/61) per capita grain consumption in China was 10% higher, according to the already cited calculations. Moreover, these figures do not take into consideration the supply of soy beans and meat which was available in China and which India lacked almost completely. In 1960/61 according to FAO, per capita food production in India was 3% higher than it was in 1958/59.<sup>21</sup> In fact, 1960/61 was the year of Indian maximum per capita food production since the war.<sup>22</sup> After that, as in other underdeveloped countries, it again began to decrease. Thus, we see that in her worst year China attained a per capita food production 7% higher than India in her worst year.

The relatively and increasingly equitable distribution of this food in China, compared with the notoriously and increasingly unequal distribution of income and consumption in India of course multiplies the consumption gap between the poorest sectors of the population in the two countries.

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16 M.J.K. Thavaraj, 'Impact of Agricultural Failures on Chinese Economy,' The Economic Weekly, Bombay, July 1963, p. 1227.

17 Cited in Snow, op. cit., p. 627.

18 Loc. cit.

19 Ibid., p. 629.

20 Loc. cit.

21 United Nations FAO, op. cit., p. 202.

22 Ibid., p. 228.



While China has recovered and advanced still further since 1961, the food situation in India has deteriorated still more. Newsweek in New York warns: 'some 20 million Indians are threatened with starvation. India's leaders, for the most part, have chosen to ascribe this year's food shortage to a drought caused by meager monsoon rains. But the real causes go far deeper.'<sup>23</sup> The Financial Times of London notes:

There are disturbing signs that India is heading for her worst food crisis in more than 20 years. In Delhi rationing came in force yesterday for the first time since 1954. . . . The crisis has been incipient for a long time. The background to it is represented by the fact that for three years after the end of the second plan, India's food-grain production showed no increase at all. In 1960/61 it totalled about 80 million tons -- by 1963/64 it was still around the same level. During the last agricultural year, 1964/65, it suddenly increased to over 88 million tons, but even so, prices did not fall to any appreciable extent. The severity of the crisis may be judged by the fact that foodgrain output during the current agricultural year, 1965/66, is expected to be much less than it was last year. . . . Independent assessments made recently indicate that the actual fall may be anywhere near 15 million or 16 million tons.<sup>24</sup>

Le Monde in Paris places the matter in historical context: 'The Indian of today has at his disposal scarcely half the amount of food which his ancestors had a century ago.'<sup>25</sup> And the Times of London predicts: 'The approaching troubles are not just incidental; it is not a matter of ill-fortune. By all signs India has entered a period of food scarcity which will be prolonged for as long as it takes to revolutionize agricultural production -- which would require in turn profound changes in social and political attitudes.'<sup>26</sup>

The other country which is so famous for its agricultural failure is Cuba. There is no doubt that sugar production, which in 1959 was 6 million tons and in 1961 was 6.8 million, decreased to 3.8 million in 1963.<sup>27</sup> It is no less certain that the sugar harvest in 1965 again passed 6 million tons.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, as the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America pointed out:

Agricultural production for internal consumption has increased at an annual rate of 5.8% which, when corrected to take into account population growth, indicates an annual per capita growth rate of 3.8% between 1957-1963. Furthermore, this constitutes the most dynamic agricultural sector, both for its average rate of expansion and for the rapid recovery which it made after the overall decline of 1961.<sup>29</sup>

The figures indicate a total increase of agricultural produce, excluding sugar cane and other industrial products, of 41% between the above stated years and of 25% between 1958 and 1963.<sup>30</sup> For all of Latin America during these same last few years UN-ECLA reports an increase of agricultural production for internal consumption of 21% and a population growth higher than in Cuba.<sup>31</sup> In addition, taking into account the relative equality of income distribution in Cuba, and its growing inequality in the rest of Latin America throughout these years, we find to what extent agriculture has 'failed' in revolutionary socialist Cuba and 'progressed' in Alliance for Progress Latin America.

The facts of reality in the world indeed speak more eloquently than words of convenience: they clearly show the way of escape from hunger.

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23 Newsweek, New York, December 20, 1965. Quoted in Global Digest, Hong Kong, January 1966, p. 161.

24 The Financial Times, London, October 11, 1965. Quoted in Global Digest, February 1966, pp. 195-196.

25 Le Monde, Paris, December 12, 1965, quoted in Global Digest, February 1966, p. 193.

26 The Times, London, November 15, 1965. Quoted in Global Digest, January 1966, p. 154.

27 Naciones Unidas, Estudio Economico de America Latina 1963. New York-Santiago, 1964, E/CN.12/696/Rev.1, p. 288.

28 Discurso de Fidel Castro, Primero del Mayo, Prensa Latina, May 2, 1965.

29 Naciones Unidas, Estudio. . . op. cit., p. 288.

30 Ibid., p. 286.

31 United Nations, Economic Survey of Latin America 1964. Mexico, 1965, E/CN.12/711, Vol. 1, Chap. II, p. 2.



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